

HUNGER | MATTHEW 4:1-4

14 & 17 MARCH 2019

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:1-4

The New Testament is clear that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person. The Gospels portray Emmanuel, God with us, full of human emotion as well as human need – like sleeping, eating and drinking. Within the forty days before Christ's passion we find the statement "he was hungry".

Food is organic – it comes from something living. Much of Jesus' food – and ours – came also from something dying. Coming from Southern California, the closest I ever came to the source of ground beef was in the supermarket before it was wrapped in cellophane (most ground beef comes already neatly wrapped). Food, living and dying form our subject matter this week. We begin with a profound statement regarding the nature of the Christian faith as being alive by Congregational minister P. T. Forsyth in his book published in 1913, *The Principle of Authority*. Second, we turn to a contemporary author and farmer, Joel Salatin, who has opened my eyes to the world most of you have grown up around in his book, *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs*, (Faith Words, 2016).

P. T. Forsyth (1913): When we use that image of a footing we think of a man on a rock, of a foothold that we can exchange for another without serious change in ourselves. But in [the Christian faith] it is not a question of our foot but of our root. We do not stand on something solid like a rock, but we grow in something vital like a soil. We are rooted and grounded *in Him*, in a personality congenial to our own. The reality in faith is not something to stand on, but something to live from. It does not simply hold, it helps and feeds. The connexion between us and it is organic, and not merely local. It is more than ground that will not give way; it is a source that will not fail or dry. We draw life from it, and it is a medium in which we live. It supports us as food does, and not simply as a floor does. We are rooted, and not only grounded, on our God. 36

Joel Salatin (2016): Fortunately, living things can heal and forgive. We can all be grateful for that. You can say an unfit word to your spouse and then apologize and things can be as good as they were before.

Not so machines. They have no feelings, no emotions, no remorse, and cannot offer forgiveness after abuse or misuse. They are inanimate. And material is similar. Clay, plastic, metal, wood—we can fashion it into whatever shape we want to without disrespecting its clayness, plasticness, metalness, or woodness. How many times have you seen a potter smash down a bowl and start over? We don't cry

over the poorly formed first attempt. It's inert substance. It has no life, no specialness, except in how we form it.

Contrast that with a pig. I can't make a pig. I can't sculpt a pig out of wood or clay and give it life. The miracle of birth is still very much a miracle. Breeding is a miracle. Starting from that fertilized egg, a pig begins to develop. From the chromosomes to the mitochondria, the cells multiply and that little pig grows. It never looks like an alligator or a tomato. It stays distinctively pig.

In fact, with pigs, several piggies grow simultaneously—even a dozen—inside the sow. As a farmer, I've seen lots of things birthed: calves, lambs, pigs, chicks. A reverent hush always settles over a birthing, a sacredness that almost begs worshipping something bigger, grander than anything we can see: God perhaps?

One of my favorite joys is stepping across the electric fence to commiserate with a group of our pastured pigs. We control them in their pastures with electric fence. My special treat is to sit down, preferably on an old stump, get real quiet and still, then just wait. Sure enough, those pigs eventually ease over to check me out. They snoodle up and down my pants, pushing their wet noses into the creases. Others nip at my shoelaces and chew at the soles of my shoes. Some come up behind me and begin nipping at my pockets or the multi-tool I carry in a leather case attached to my belt.

The friendliest and most docile sidle up alongside and place a chin on my knee, waiting for a rub. Pigs universally like to be rubbed and scratched just above their tails. They straighten out their tails in response and lean into me, like a cat that's being petted. If I begin scratching a pig's belly, he'll often flop down right there on his side, making the exercise even easier. The point here is that the pigs and I can respond to each other.

When you wash and wax your car, does it ease over next to you to demonstrate its happiness and appreciation of your attention? Does the steering wheel turn sideways and rest on your lap when you turn in gently? Animals are not machines. They have distinctive personalities. Even in an eight-pig litter, some will be aggressive and others timid. Some will be a little on the wild side and others will be docile. Some will be more curious and others will hold back when confronted with something new. 16-17

Perhaps a big issue we need to deal with at this point is the pushback that if life is so special, what gives us the right to kill and eat? How does killing the pig honor its glory? How is the pigness of the pig revered when we enjoy bacon for breakfast? That's certainly a valid question. First, let's look at this biblically. Nowhere does the Bible even hint that eating animals is wrong. The patriarchs ate animals. The feasts included animals. Jesus ate animals. The disciples and apostles ate animals.

How does killing and eating animals add strength to their glory? Because life requires death. While it's true that killing a carrot, in the big scheme of things, is no different from killing a chicken, when the blood flows and the eyes go dim, it's far more graphic and real. The typology of sacrifice preceding life occurs throughout the Old Testament and culminates, of course, in the ultimate sacrifice of God's son as the perfect lamb to take away the sins of the world...

Our sustenance is completely and utterly dependent on taking life, be it plant or animal. That alone should drive us to appreciate the sanctity and precious value of life. That means we don't hurt people

and things unnecessarily. We're all one step away from our last breath. Every breath is a gift, borrowed, or snatched, from the hands of death.

That's the biblical part. Now let's go to the ecological part. Everything is eating and being eaten. If you don't believe it, go lie naked in your flower bed for three days and see what gets eaten. Watch any nature documentary and you'll be struck by all the consumption and death going on. From microbes including bacteria and nematodes to viruses, amoebas, and elephants—all of life is eating, biting, chewing.

Unfortunately, our techno-sophisticated culture's love affair with Disney has Thumpered and Bambied us to the point that most people feel completely segregated from this visceral death reality. Our skins die. Our blood cells die. Microbes live in our bedsheets, chomping dead skin. Does this make you shiver? I think it's hilarious.

All that being said, I would suggest that what makes the sacrifice of any being sacred is how it was honored in life. To take that one step further, I would even suggest that only when we've honored the life do we have the right to make the sacrifice. In other words, someone who has abused the life, disrespected the life, looked at it as just inanimate stuff, does not deserve to kill and eat. The right to participate in that sacred act must be earned.

Think about the worship surrounding biblical sacrifices. Every one entailed a hush, a God-centric demeanor. Sacrifices were not a place to exalt the dominion of man, but a place to humbly appreciate the cost of life. And of course, altar sacrifices show the cost of forgiveness, which is the door into eternal life. 26-28

Hunger = *epeinasen* [Aorist Active Indicative 3 person singular – *peinazo, peinao*]

NIDNTT, Vol 2

Eating and drinking are basic to human life. In the world of the ancient east, which suffered frequently from famines and droughts, they assume a particular importance... Man's need of sustenance is denoted by the verbs *peinao*, to hunger (cf. *limos*, hunger). As time went on the words acquired metaphorical significance and were used to express spiritual nourishment or the lack of it. 264

Classical Greek Literature – *peinao* means to hunger... The range of meaning is not limited to physical want, but extends to the intellectual and spiritual life (from Plato 428-348 B.C.; and Xenophon 431-354 B.C.). They express a passionate longing for something without which one cannot live. 265

Old Testament – In the LXX [the Greek translation of the Hebrew scripture, around 300 B.C.] *peinao* mostly translated the Hebrew *raef*, to be hungry, but also *ayep*, to be weary, faint of exhausted, and *yaep*, to be weary or faint... While *peinao* occurs about 50 times in the LXX, *limos* is attested over 100 times. *Limos* denotes acute lack of food, famine; *peinao* stresses long drawn-out hungering. 265

Hunger and thirst are reckoned as the worse forms of lack, and of the two thirst is even more distressing than hunger in the sun-drenched east... It was in times of need (e.g. during the wandering in the wilderness, and in the land of Canaan) that Israel learned that God was her real Saviour from

need (Ex 16:3 ff.; 17:3 ff.; cf. 1 Ki 8:37 ff.). Yahweh takes up the cause of the hungry who belong to the dispossessed poor (1 Sam 2:5). While judgment is pronounced on those who are filled, there is the promise of salvation for the hungry (Ps 107: 36 ff.; 146:7; Isa 65:13). 265

Amos 8:11-13 speaks of a hungering after the word of God alongside an actual famine: God can in the end withhold everything as a punishment. Several passages directed to the Jewish people during the Babylonian exile have particular significance. Though at present discouraged (Isa 40:27-31) and poor (41:17 f.; 49:9 f.; 55:1), they will be allowed by God to return home. He will transform the arduous route through the desert into an oasis journey (Isa 41:19; 43:20; 48:21, as at the exodus), and their wasted homeland itself into a “garden of salvation” (Ez 34:29; cf. Isa 35:1, 6 f.). This material well-being includes the idea of spiritual salvation (Isa 44:3; Jer 31:12). 266

New Testament – OT and NT take man’s physical need very seriously. But it is not only the stomach but the whole man that needs to be satisfied. External wellbeing and inner salvation are most closely related. This explains the fact that many NT statements about hunger and thirst show a peculiar ambiguity, making it scarcely possible to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical. 266

The Beatitude of Matt 5:6 understands hunger as “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” In contrast to the self-righteousness of Jewish legalism “hunger for righteousness” means the felt need and consequent longing for divine righteousness (cf. Matt 6:10, third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy will be done . . . Give us this day our daily bread . . .” According to Matthew those who hunger are the same as those who believe and long for the kingdom of God (6:33). Their promised filling begins with the coming of Jesus and continues until everything else is theirs a well. 267

Hunger and thirst in the Johannine writings have a double meaning. Natural thirst (Jn 4:13) and physical hunger (6:1 ff.) convey the longing for life in general. Jesus seizes upon this longing in order to show that it is only through contact with himself, the life-giver, that it is satisfied (4:14 f.; 6:35, “I am the bread of life”; alluding to Ex 16:3 ff., 7:37). But what is promised in all the sayings about the satisfaction of hunger and thirst is only fully received in God’s new world. Then all the physical and spiritual needs of earth will be ended (Rev 7:16; 21:6; 22:17 – Isa 49:10; 55:1; cf. Lk 1:53; 6:21 parallel Mat 5:6). 267

The description in the gospels of Jesus himself having to suffer hunger and thirst serves to show the Son of God in his humanity. After 40 days of fasting hunger became for Jesus a temptation from the devil to use his authority as Son of God to satisfy his own need through a miracle (Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2; cf. Mk 1:12 f.). Only in obedience to God’s word was he able to stand firm, for “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4; cf. Lk 4:4; Deut 8:3). 267